

VZCZCXRO4865
RR RUEHCI
DE RUEHKA #3389/01 1621609
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 111609Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8544
INFO RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1154
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9142
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8568
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7467
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 003389

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE, SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: CLASHES MARK OPPOSITION'S DHAKA SIEGE PROGRAM

1.(SBU) Summary: Despite a June 10 High Court ban, the AL-led 14-party alliances held it's "Siege to Dhaka" program on June 11 demanding electoral reforms and resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC). Clashes between police and demonstrators occurred in and around Dhaka resulting in injury to scores of demonstrators and police personnel, damage to vehicles, a halt to traffic movement to and from the capital city and thinner traffic within the city. Government leaders have described the opposition action as "anarchic" and "illegal." The 14-party alliance leaders are expected to review the situation and announce their next course of agitation in the evening. End Summary

2. (SBU) On June 11, leaders of the 14-party alliance led demonstrations to block four major highways leading to the capital and at a number of spots within the city. Police and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) charged demonstrator with batons, and fired rubber bullets, teargas canisters and blank shots to clear the highways of the demonstrators, who threw stones and brickbats at the law enforcers. The violence halted traffic on all major highways into Dhaka for a few hours starting at 9 A.M.

3. (SBU) The opposition demonstration drew the largest crowd at Kanchpur bridge point in Narayanganj district, about 15 kilometers southeast from Dhaka on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway. AL Organizing Secretary Akhtaruzzaman told the Embassy that about 2000 activists gathered at this point for "peaceful demonstration" on the highway for a few hours. When the police attempted to move them away using batons and teargas shells, the demonstrators resisted, throwing stones at the police and the BDR, which forced the security forces to retreat. Akhtaruzzaman said the crowd at this spot swelled to between 20,000 and 25,000 by noon as curious people joined the "festival"; however, other sources estimate no more than 10,000. Former AL legislator and army chief Major General (Retired) K.M. Shafiullah was hurt on his nose at this spot. It was not clear whether a stone thrown by a demonstrator or a police baton caused the injury. A number of other demonstrators and police received injuries. At 1:45 P.M., police reinforcements regained control and helped restore traffic movement. A press reporter said police admitted firing bullets in the sky to scare away the demonstrators.

4.(SBU) At Tongi, about 20 kilometers north from Dhaka, AL legislator Zahid Ahsan Russell and Tongi municipal chairman Azmatullah were among the 1,000 demonstrators hurt in police action. At Savar, northwest of Dhaka, former Home Minister Mohammad Nasim MP and former State Minister for Information, Abu Sayeed, were among AL leaders hurt in police action on demonstrators. AL leader Abdur Razzaq MP and Tofail Ahmed led the demonstration at Maowa ferry station, 38 kilometers south from Dhaka, halting traffic movement to and from the

southern districts. At the Gabtali bus terminal near Mirpur, in the northwest of Dhaka, another procession led by former AL MP Kamal Ahmed Majumder clashed with police in the morning.

Sporadic Clashes in Dhaka

5.(SBU) In central Dhaka, Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid, AL legislators Shahjahan Khan, Dr. Abdur Razzak and Panchanon Biswas led a demonstration at Russell Square in the upscale Dhanmondi neighborhood. Shahid told the Embassy that police swooped on the demonstrators unprovoked and hurt the MPs and even women activists. A number of policemen were injured by stones thrown by demonstrators. Police and demonstrators also clashed in Maghbazar, Nawabpur in old Dhaka, and in Mirpur. According to media reports, some demonstrators uprooted railway tracks in Khilgaon/Goran area causing disruption to the movement of trains.

High Court Ban Ignored

¶6. (SBU) A High Court judge on June 10 imposed a temporary injunction on the "Siege to Dhaka" on a petition from Advocate Rabiul Islam of a little known political party called the Muslim Millat Party. Islam's lawyer claimed that the "siege" is an infringement on the citizens' right to movement. Opposition leaders defied the injunction saying that they did not "officially" know about it as June 10 was a holiday and, moreover, they would not abide by the court ban as there were instances of the government not honoring court rulings. The hearing of the petition at a regular bench on June 11 could not take place as the pro-AL Supreme Court Bar Association leaders called for court boycott to

DHAKA 00003389 002 OF 002

protest the ban on "Siege to Dhaka" and blocked the court gates to prevent lawyers and judges from entering the court premises.

AL Ponders Its Next Move

¶7. (SBU) AL Joint General Secretary Mukul Bose told the Embassy that the 14-party alliance leaders would decide the next course of action at a meeting the evening of June 11. Asked if AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil's earlier announcement that the alliance would observe a two-day non-stop general strike starting June 12, Bose said the response of the people to the "siege" didn't warrant a strike. There were no big incidents that would justify calling a non-stop strike, he said, adding that there may be two days of strikes lasting 12-hours.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) Despite two postponements, the AL was unable to generate anything approaching the popular support promised in their pre-siege rhetoric. Although the AL will publicly trumpet today's turnout and pillory the BDG for excessive force, privately they may finally be forced to acknowledge vanishing public support for hartals and street demonstrations. For now, however, it appears to be their only strategy for challenging the BDG.